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## Principles of Divine Guidance

*by T. Austin-Sparks*

*Transcribed from a spoken message given in January, 1955.*

In the book of Exodus, chapter 40. Chapter 40, the book of Exodus, verses 34 to 38:

*"Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. And Moses was not able to enter into the tent of meeting, because the cloud abode thereon, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. And when the cloud was taken up from over the tabernacle, the children of Israel went onward, throughout all their journeys: but if the cloud was not taken up, then they journeyed not till the day that it was taken up. For the cloud of the Lord was upon the tabernacle by day, and there was fire therein by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel, throughout their journeys".*

It's on my heart this morning to say a little about Divine guidance.

### **Divine Guidance**

A matter, which I am quite sure, interests us in a very real way. On this matter at any rate, one has not to try and create a basis or a word, it's amongst those matters which are always very much to the fore in the life of the children of God. Now, in this matter of guidance, life has to be viewed as a whole. That is the first thing about it, and a very important thing. The guidance of the nation of Israel through the wilderness is always viewed conclusively. There are such words as: "He led them on safely, so that they feared not"; "He led them by a straight path, that they might go to a city of habitation". In the phases and the stages of the journey very often that seemed not to be true. They feared not because He led them on safely? By a straight path? In neither of those matters did it always seem to be true. But you see, this matter of their guidance, of their being led by Him is

always viewed conclusively. The fact is that they got there at last, and it is the end and the verdict which covers the whole course.

And it is like that with Divine guidance. We must recognise this, and settle this, that we have got to take Life as a whole. If we only take it at given times and in given situations, we shall be in confusion, in contradiction, perhaps with big questions as to this matter of guidance, a great deal of perplexity, uncertainty, doubt, and perhaps a feeling that we've just been left, there's no guidance at all in our lives. But we must take the long view, and the end will prove that we were being guided, even when we thought otherwise, that the Hand was upon us when it seemed that it was not so. Divine guidance has to be viewed from the standpoint of the whole - life in its entirety has to be brought into relation to the guidance of God.

When we have got that clear - and you know the Word of God does bear that out very fully - we are able to take another step, and to see that this inclusiveness, comprehensiveness, and conclusiveness of Divine guidance is related to two things.

Firstly, it is related to:

### **Divine Purpose.**

*All* the guidance of God is related to His purpose. His purpose is a very clearly defined thing, a very concrete and definite thing, a set and fixed object, and His guidance is completely bound up with His purpose. And when His purpose is really governing, has come to become the sole interest and object of our lives, there is a sovereignty over *everything*. "*All* things work together for good," for, or literally, "God works good in all things to them that love Him and are the called according to His purpose". That is a very comprehensive "all things". And the statement is that not one of the "*all* things" is without some good being definitely put into it, and got out of it, by the sovereignty of God, when His purpose governs. That cannot be said of the 'all things' which compose lives which are not so governed. Their 'all things' do not work good. The guidance of God is therefore inseparable from His purpose.

This is perfectly clear in the case of Israel. The purpose of God was made known quite clearly and definitely, to bring them into the land; from the beginning that was made clear. It came out so definitely and positively when they were over Jordan, and Joshua was actually about to lead them in. The Lord said so definitely to Joshua that he was to be strong and of good courage, because he was to bring the people *into* the land which the Lord had *sworn* to give them. There's the purpose; the sworn objective of God to bring into the land. That was His purpose. We know that that is an historical figure and type of what we have in the New Testament - the heavenly country and all the riches and fullness of Christ. That land of Canaan was a land flowing with milk and honey, wealth, riches, mines, deep mines full, and so on. It was only a pale foreshadowing of what came in with Christ, "Oh the depth of the riches... the unsearchable riches of Christ". Well, we know all about that, but this, just to reiterate, that the purpose of God is the fullness of Christ, and all Divine guidance is bound up with that.

And then in the next place, Divine guidance is bound up with, and centred in:

### **God's Vessel.**

Here in the case of Israel it is set forth in the tabernacle. Immediately the Lord had accomplished the *redemption* of His people, He proceeded to reveal that great design which embodied His purpose - the tabernacle - His vessel. And again, we know so well that the tabernacle was a two-fold figure of Christ and His Church; if you like, of Christ dominant, and then in corporate expression; I need not argue that, I think we shall all agree that that was so. Christ and His Church, Christ its foundation, Christ its character, Christ giving it its nature and meaning - it taking from Him everything - that is the vessel of God's purpose. That was to precede, that was to be central, that was to govern, and *all* Divine guidance was related to that.

This is a point that perhaps has not been clearly recognised. This tabernacle was a far, far more important thing than we have recognised. We like the pictorial aspect of it and we are very pleased with all this typology of the tabernacle, but it has been brought down to such an earthly level. Just reflect for a moment that for forty days and forty nights, in unceasing communion, God was revealing to Moses the details, the whole conception and construction and constitution of that tabernacle. Forty days and forty nights Moses was with the Lord in the mountain getting this thing. A pattern, we are told, only a pattern; a representation of something and then, when he had from the Lord received that so meticulously, carefully and fully, it required a definite coming in of the Holy Spirit to superintend the making of it in every part and detail - the whole structure and the whole material. "Men full of the Holy Ghost", the Holy Spirit is definitely in charge of this thing, there's something here of tremendous significance and account.

It is a great, heavenly order of things, a vast heavenly order of things condensed into the framework and material of a symbolic representation, but all that vast heavenly order and system is there implicit in principle. And when it was set up, all Divine guidance was bound up with it. That's the point. The cloud rested, they could not move; the people could not move without it. The tabernacle - Christ and His Church - in figure. He governed all their movements and all their times - their goings, and just as much the stoppings and the stayings. You see, the Church - when it is as God would have it - governs movement, determines progress. God sometimes has to wait for His Church before He can move. There were those stayings and waitings of the cloud because things were not right amongst the people. Adjustments had got to be made, wrongs had got to be righted, evil had got to be put away. There's no movement in the Church, there's no guidance to any further step or stage or measure until this Body is right. And that could be profitably enlarged upon but it's a very important thing to see how God binds up His guidance with the state of His people; with His Church and how our relationship to the Church is an important factor in the guidance of our own lives. Not one individual in all the thousands of Israel was an independent unit in this matter and could go without the others! Ever individual as such had to wait for all the rest for their guidance. Their guidance was a related matter; that's the point: their guidance was a corporate matter. The cloud rested upon the tabernacle, and the people were bound up with that, inseparable from that; it was one thing.

These are very important things, dear friends, for progress, for guidance. You are exercised about the guidance for your life? Your guidance, if this is true, very largely, if not absolutely, rests upon these two things: God's purpose - the fullness of Christ, and God's means or vessel - His Church. It is a related thing. I know as I speak that difficulties arise, but I can only enunciate the principle at this time, leaving details for another time.

See, then, how jealous God was for this tabernacle - jealous over every detail of it, and jealous over relationships to it because He was not seeing a *thing* called a 'tabernacle', or the tent of meeting and

all its paraphernalia. *He was seeing His Son*, He was seeing His Church. God always has that in view, not *things*, but the eternal reality, that of which this is only a pattern. Now then, having said that, you must take that to heart and think about it, for it may answer some questions, or solve some problems.

We note further then, that there was always an element of mystery about this guidance, as there always is. An element of mystery in this that God's wisdom and God's knowledge in His ways with us, in His guidance of us, are not *always* revealed to us. The element of faith is always present, or has always to be present. And God's wisdom is a hidden wisdom, His full knowledge is a secret thing - He does not disclose to us His 'whys', His 'wherefores', what He's doing and why He is doing it, in this way or that, He does not explain. But there is always a meaning, as this history of Israel shows, always a meaning in each stage of the Divine guidance. There's a meaning at every stage. There's something there, lying within every thing of the Divine movement - or the Divine non-movement. There's something in this; this is not just a random thing, a casual thing, an inconsequential thing. With His purpose in view, God has a meaning in every phase and every stage of His ways with us and it is important for us to believe that, and always look upon any particular phase, or stage, or aspect of our life with God from that standpoint: What has God got in this? That is the thing that matters. Not, "Let's get out of this as soon as we can, let's get past this, let's go on"; see? No, what has this got to reveal? What has this got to teach? There's something there that God has, and we have to discover it, because the cloud will not move until we have.

It may be that some are in the stopping place of Divine guidance, and you're all restless and hot to *get on* to the next phase, the next stage. You are impatient. Are you quite sure, are you quite sure that you have got your hand upon the meaning of this phase that you are in, that you've being in? Are you quite sure? Are you quite clear, that you can say, "Well, I don't know, I didn't know, why the Lord brought about such a situation, such an arrest; allowed such an experience, but I have believed that He had some meaning in it, and I have definitely had this understanding with Him that I don't want to miss what He has got at this present time because it is all a part of that cumulative value which, after all, is the fullness of Christ"! For the fullness of Christ is not some *place* to which you are going, it's some spiritual Life which is growing now. We have got to eliminate these geographical factors, you see, from an earthly representation of heavenly things, and remember that here *time and distance have no place at all*. They only have a place - if they have any place at all - in this: that we can proceed *years* in a moment, we can take, to use literal terms, *miles* spiritually, in a step.

We have only got to grasp what God means in this way: that you are determined not, *not* to move until you *do* know that you have got what God means by your present experience. You only need to grasp it, see it, come alive to it, and you'll have moved on years and moved on a great distance. Time is only a factor while we are failing either in apprehension for some reason or other, or in obedience. Do you see the point? Israel could have got through to the land in nine days. And it took forty years. Why? Not because the Lord had appointed forty years, but because the purpose of God was not strongly enough settled in their hearts as all-dominating to rule out personal interests and considerations. And so *they* made the time, not the Lord; *they* made the miles, not the Lord. I hope you've grasped that.

But let's concentrate back on this one point, dear friends. Let us make sure that we are learning what God is trying to teach us *now*, because there will be no movement until we do. The cloud will not lift and go on until we have got it in our hands, "What has the Lord been after in all this?" That's *vital* to the next phase and all subsequent phases. Have you got it? Are you quite sure about

it? Well, there is something hidden to be discovered and to be laid hold of in every phase and stage of the way.

And all that is:

### **Discipline.**

You see, the fact that God has a great purpose settled, and fixed, and clearly defined, and that we are called according thereto, and that there is a working of Divine sovereignty - all that *never* eliminates the factor of discipline, for the simple reason that God is *not* acting mechanically. This is not a machine put together and wound up and started going just by itself, by its own momentum. *Always* in God's purpose and His methods with us, there is the element of responsibility. God *never* made a machine, He made *man*, man! And man has responsibility. See? Responsibility. We are responsible creatures, and therefore discipline has its place because there is no mechanical reaching His end by God, but along the line of *our* choice. Will, of course, is the point, the focal point of everything. Will, will, will - that was the trouble with Israel; that's the trouble with us all. It's the will. There will always be the bafflement of the human mind, very largely, but the way through is a *will* that is absolutely set upon God's end, whatever that may cost.

And then, although there will always be this element of mystery and perplexity, discipline and instruction, growing intelligence unto responsibility, there will always remain a large margin for Divine sovereignty. Think again of Paul and his journey to Rome. You know what he says, don't you, at the beginning of his letter to the Romans, long before he went to them. The opening of his letter to them told them of his love and his unceasing prayer for them, and then he tells them that he would have them know that he would have come to them again and yet again he would have come to them, but he was hindered. Here is a man with his heart set upon the interests of the Lord in His Church as represented in Rome. He is a man whose life is wholly and utterly abandoned to Christ and to the Church, who is longing to be able to minister Christ to them in greater fullness, who purposes to go, and then is hindered; and purposes again and is hindered; seeks to move in their direction, and apparently is frustrated. The point is, what a strength of purpose and desire for God is here - and the mystery, the mystery of hindrances, frustrations and delay!

And then, at last, at long last, how did he get to Rome? Very, very differently from what he intended, and purposed and thought! He had never calculated with that last voyage and all that was in it. It seemed, on the one hand, that all hell was determined that he shouldn't get there. On the other hand, God's mysterious ways. We don't know what would have happened if Paul had just gone to Rome in the way in which he had gone elsewhere, to other places, paid a visit, but God had some *infinitely* greater thought in Paul at last reaching Rome than Paul had ever thought. That's the mystery of God's ways.

Well, the shipwreck, the shipwreck the way that he did get there, but the historian just sums it all up in one clause: "and so we came to Rome..." the verdict of the long run, mystery between the conception and inception and the realisation - the mystery of satanic interference, the mystery of difficulties, the mysteries of reverses and of *shipwreck* and everything else, *but* the verdict: "*And so we came to Rome.*" We came to Rome! Divine guidance has to cover *everything*. If Paul had settled on any one of these incidents, he would have been in very great difficulty indeed with the Lord. But, he got there, he got there, at last.

If you and I, dear friends, are so governed, dominated, mastered, by God's end - the fullness of Christ - and wedded to Christ Himself, and will allow the Lord to do it in His own way, and will seek to get hold of the meaning and value of every part of the way, the end is sure, the end is secured. The end will be - "*And so we came...* sometimes it looked as though we should never get there, shipwrecked? Yes, shipwrecked in many ways, it looked very, very much as though we would never get there, but the fact is, we're there!

But we must see the principles of Divine guidance. The first is *God's purpose of fullness*; the second is *God's vessel of realisation*, the *Church* is the fullness of Him, and it is *relatedness* that is a law of fullness. There will always be enough mystery about God's ways to *demand faith*, which is another law of guidance. But, sovereignty is over all for such; and no matter what the delays, frustrations, hindrances or threats, at last we shall say right over all those times and experiences when we thought it so otherwise, in present situations, right over: "Jesus led me all the way".